

Capital Punishment

will be a lot easier for you to get reelected by voting against abolition of capital punishment than in favour. It is the same thing for Progressive Conservatives.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want to say this: In my party, the Social Credit Party, we are 11 members and we all advocate retention of capital punishment, not in a spirit of vengeance, no, but in a spirit of justice. If a man is so heartless as to attack the life of another, he should be prepared to put his own life on the line. He is well aware of the existing law, he knows it, if he wants to defy it, let him pay for the damages, that is justice and order . . .

An hon. Member: Will you be here to vote?

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): I hope so. If I am in hospital, I shall be unable to be here to vote. My hon. friend knows very well that I shall vote to retain capital punishment.

Mr. Pelletier: That is because you believe it!

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): Yes, it is because I believe it.

Mr. Pelletier: We can believe something else.

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): No, you should believe what your constituents tell you to believe. In your riding, 80 per cent of your constituents are in favour of capital punishment.

Mr. Pelletier: We have brains to use them.

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): Yes, I understand. But your voters were not intelligent when they elected you. It is one or the other.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will go back to his riding—he knows full well I am not lying—where his electors are in favour of retaining capital punishment. I am convinced they will watch how he votes in this House. The hon. member is answerable to his electors, not I.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will have to manage with his electors but I say, in the province of Quebec, the people expect us to vote for retaining the death penalty and I say that, in the other provinces in Canada, in Toronto, in the maritime provinces, even in Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Alberta, everywhere, and to the same extent, the people want or recommend retention. That is exactly what we are going to do and I ask hon. members who are really free, to vote for maintaining the death penalty.

[English]

Mr. D. M. Collenette (York East): Mr. Speaker, it is quite novel to be able to take part in a debate which is entirely non partisan, for a change. I think that is a crucial point to make, especially for this side of the House, because there is considerable opinion throughout the country that this bill to abolish capital punishment is a partisan move by the Liberal Party. Although retentionist resolutions have for many years been rejected by national Liberal conventions, I think that rank and file members of our party throughout the country are seriously divided on the question, at least as divided as hon. members on this side of the House.

The question posed in Bill C-84 is not one of government program and not one in which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) or the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) are forcing their own convictions down the throats of their colleagues. Rather, it is a question of conscience and a question of moral choice to be exercised in one's own right.

However, I must emphasize one small point of procedure in the debate on this matter which has been alluded to by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) and was substantiated in the question period today. It is unfortunate that members of the Treasury benches have been denied their right to make this moral choice because of cabinet solidarity. This has tended to confuse public opinion and has tended to give the impression that Bill C-84 is a Liberal bill. As we shall see often in this debate, this will be a very free vote, so free, in fact, that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) and the former leader of the opposition will vote for the bill, along with many of their colleagues. The list of speakers on this bill is long, and like the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) but unlike the hon. member who preceded me, I do not propose to take my full time in the debate.

I should like to deal with two aspects of capital punishment, first in the context of the present social and economic climate, and second with due respect to the hon. member for Egmont, in the context of the rights of the state to exercise absolute power over the life and death of the individual.

Let us look at the current climate upon which present public attitudes toward capital punishment are based. It may be remembered that immediately after the second world war public opinion favouring retention was as high as present polls indicate it is now. And no wonder, for two generations had come to be brutalized by the effects of two world wars. Death on the battlefield, on the seas, and in the skies was an everyday occurrence. The enemy was to be killed; it was a matter of survival.

Capital punishment polls in the late 1940's were a spillover from the hostilities of the war and reflected the cynicism and despair of the era. No wonder that sensitivities to the human condition were blunted.

● (1710)

However, post war prosperity returned Canada to normal. Pockets were full, bellies were full. And we all know, Mr. Speaker, that when one's pockets and one's belly are full, one is more considerate, compassionate and tolerant—considerate, compassionate and tolerant toward all beliefs, to all races, to all creeds, and even tolerant toward